

Cherry Hinton Community Benefit Society AGM - 8th June 2023 Annual Report

By the time of the last AGM it seemed that everything was moving forward. A construction company DCH had been appointed to build the Hub and funding was in place from the City Council. The Board had now established three working groups, Finance, Business Plan and Fund-raising. A partnership had been established with CBS and a launch for small businesses was due to be held at the CBS store in Cherry Hinton. Fund-raising was focused on raising £50,000 for the Cherry Branch Cafe´ (named by the community). In the 2022 report however it can be seen that concerns were felt by the directors about what part of the build the community funding would be used for as well as a suggested financial contingency plan involving a loan from the City Council being discussed. I ended my report by saying we were now at an exciting part in the progress of the project and there was going to be a lot of energy needed in the next year! I had no idea how true this would prove to be!

Developments since the last AGM

The new CHCBS year started by the Directors deciding to get clarification re: the use of the Community funding and the contingency plan suggested by the City Council. As Cathy McCluskey, our very knowledgeable director in charge of grant applications told us, it was very important if funds were to be raised from grants that CHCBS should have ownership of the project – the fitting out of the cafe´ (which had been suggested by the Strategic Project Manager – Allison Conder) was perfect as we would be able to appoint our own kitchen equipment supplier.

The City Council have usually been very supportive of the Hub build. It is an unusual project for them because they are supplying most of the funding. They were concerned that in a worse case scenario the funds would not be raised so suggested we should agree to a loan which would be paid up with interest to top up what was raised. This would need to be agreed before we knew how much funding we could raise. Having taken advice from CCVS we knew we could not agree to either of these items.

At a meeting following the AGM it was felt that if these two issues could not be resolved the Directors would walk away from the project. Following a discussion between the Chair and Anna Smith, the then Leader of the Council, with follow up by the Secretary and Alex Collis, the then Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development, it was agreed that fund-raising would focus on the cafe´ and the project could go ahead without agreement to the loan. We were all agreed that there had been a break-down in communication. The Directors are very grateful to Anna Smith and Alex Collis for their help sorting this out, also to the advice given by CCVS both for this and other matters. I am pleased to report that communication has been good since then. I have been in regular contact with Allison Conder and had meetings with Alex Collis to explain our progress. As will be seen CHCBS has been involved in the decision making process throughout.

Designing The Cafe´Kitchen

On Monday 1st August we met in the library with Allison, representatives from Ingleton Wood (IW the architects) and Scott from Intracat who had designed The Meadows Community Centre cafe´ kitchen and would be fitting it. The kitchen design was needed so that the right infrastructure – e.g. electric sockets and plumbing were on the plans before the build started. The Cafe´ Kitchen Design Group were Stephen Hall (Lead for the Build), Marny Wesley (who has spent her career in catering), Kate Jones and the Chair. It was made clear that Intracat's input at this point would be to draw up plans and produce a detailed quote for what was needed. Allison Conder had costed this into the budget. CHCBS would consider the quote from Intracat but for grant application purposes would need to compare this with quotes from two other firms. A decision would then be made as to who would supply the equipment and fit it.

Scott produced plans. There were several meetings as plans were reviewed and redrawn. It was decided the storage space adjacent to the cafe' was needed to house fridge/freezers, lockers etc. The plans were finally signed off on October 19th. We now have an itemised list of equipment needed for the kitchen which can be sent when applying for grants – our thanks to Scott for the way he worked with us to get the kitchen we wanted, also to Marny Wesley for her knowledge of what was needed.

Project Meetings for the Build

Stephen Hall and Mo Child attended the first Pre- Contract Meeting on 5th December. Present were representatives of DCH the contractor, IW the architects, Calfordseaden -employer's agent/quantity surveyors, Cambridgeshire Libraries and Cambridge City Council. There have been two more of these meetings to date but also other meetings when we have considered access, acoustics and interior finishes. We have met at Cherry Hinton and Milton Road libraries and also made a visit to the IW Office at Oakington. We are working closely with Andrew Stoter, Library Support Services Manager to decide on access and interior design. Stephen Hall has been present at most of these meetings leading our input – I was particularly grateful at the first meeting by the way he said that we would need all acronyms explained – this has proved to be very useful in understanding the process. Roy Child has joined the team and his knowledge of electrics and electronics has proved very useful, Kate Jones has been part of the team when discussing interior design. Kate Jones's presence at this and the kitchen design meetings has been very useful due to her networking skills and it has given her knowledge helpful to fund-raising.

Financing the Project

In my last report I wrote due to Covid and various other factors there is an escalating cost within the construction sector. This is one reason why the project is proceeding as quickly as possible so that the contractor can then tender required work packages and confirm contract pricing. Allison Conder and Natalie Bailey, Project Manager – Housing Development Team, worked hard with Lee Bentley and later Matt Smith from Calfordseaden, to ensure the final specification met the client brief but found that it could not be met within the original budget. Allison Conder prepared a new budget which was presented and accepted by the City Council in February, however final costings showed that another top up was needed. Following discussion within the Labour group and opposition spokespersons, on April 4th, Mike Davey, the then Executive Councillor for Finance, Resources and Transformation, agreed to an out-of cycle decision to increase the funding to £1,643,089 which means a top up of £841,518 additional capital funding. I would like to thank Anna Smith, Alex Collis and Mike Davey for their support for the project and Allison Conder, Strategic Project Leader Communities, for her hard work on the budget.

Starting the Build

Not only was there a financial complication but also building regulations were due to run out on June 15th and Planning on September 23rd. If the build did not start before June 15th then new regulations would come into force and the build costs would rise further. Allison Conder worked hard with DCH to produce a timeline so the deadline could be met. It was agreed that the library should close on April 29th and the handover of keys, meter readings etc. should take place on Monday May 15th which has happened. CHCBS has worked with Andrew Stoter to make sure that most of the furniture in the library which was not needed was recycled to local organisations. CHCBS would like to thank Andrew Stoter for arranging the transport and storage of items e.g. crockery which has been collected for use in the cafe' in the future.

Trustees/Directors

The Directors have continued to meet monthly. Most meetings have been by Google meets but we have also met 3 times in the library – the last time just before it closed. A big vote of thanks to Stuart Newbold who as Secretary has written the minutes for the meetings.

The directors were very pleased that Smita Botre agreed to become a co-opted director and attended her first meeting in February. A Cherry Hinton resident Smita is already a member of our fund-raising team and brings to the directors, new enthusiasm, a knowledge of the library service as well as experience of working as a manager of a local food hub.

Directors' Activities

Financial Group – Roy Child, Stuart Newbold, Marny Wesley, Prabhu Guptara decide financial strategy.

Business Plan – Stuart Newbold, Roy Child Marny Wesley, Cathy McCluskey.

Build Project – Stephen Hall, Mo Child, Roy Child, Kate Jones

Kitchen Design - Stephen Hall, Marny Wesley, Mo Child, Kate Jones

Policies and Grant Applications – Cathy McCluskey, Mo Child

Fund-raising – Kate Jones, Cathy McCluskey, Smita Botre, Mo Child.

Visits – a group of directors visited the Arbury Community Centre. Useful knowledge was gained from the Manager Alan Soer who has since retired but is willing to be a consultant as we set up the Hub.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management)

The CRM system which Roy Child and Kate Jones established last year to organise data and help us to use it more effectively is being trialled. A second item of software “Cameo” is also being trialled to see which is best for the following: storing and sharing sensitive documents, storing private data of individuals, running the CHCBS membership once it is opened to the public and GDPR compliance.

Communicating with the City Council

Councillors Mark Ashton and Rob Dryden have continued to represent us with their City Council colleagues

Mo Child and Stuart Newbold have represented CHCBS at regular meetings with the Project Manager.

Mo Child had regular meetings with the Executive Councillor for Open Spaces, Food Justice and Community Development until her recent resignation. It is hoped that this can continue with her replacement.

Communications

Roy Child manages the website which is being updated to make it more effective for fund-raising. Kate Jones and Cathy McCluskey manage Social Media. Numbers at the moment – all up from those given last year.

Facebook 611 followers

Twitter 68 followers

Instagram 250 followers

Volunteers

There have been some very supportive volunteers this year mainly helping with fund-raising.

Training

Directors have continue to take advantage of courses run by CCVS and also use their advice.

Community Engagement

Partnership with Cambridge Building Society. Kate Jones and Mo Child have met regularly with the Manager of Cherry Hinton Store, Dan Killingback. This led to two events held in the store. The first a networking event for small businesses in the locality on Wednesday 15th June 2022 was well attended. A number of useful contacts were made and a realisation how useful the 1 to 1 meeting room could be for those who work from home to meet contacts. A second networking event for local community groups was also well attended, useful contacts made and a suggestion of fund-raising events. Thanks to CBS for their support and Kate Jones who organised the event with CBS.

Fund-raising

Kate Jones, the director who is leading the group, reports that there has been a mixture of awareness raising and fundraising over the last year. But mostly awareness raising. The fundraising part can start in earnest now that the build is underway.

Events since the last AGM:

- Gerry O'Keeffe's art exhibition was held at St. Andrew's in September and is now ongoing at Muir and Kerr's Salon. With Gift Aid Gerry will have raised nearly £1000 for the Hub.
- Christmas Craft Fair – Bhindu, one of the members of the Fund-raising group, organised this event with a lot of her friends in the library, it was very popular with families queuing outside. As well as awareness of the project It raised £124.

Networking with Businesses and Organisations

- Conversations have continued with Bellway who are looking to give us a donation in the near future
- John Lewis – Kate Jones is in initial discussions with John Lewis and they are willing to work with the Benefit Society.
- Synaptics – Kate Jones and Mo Child have had an initial meeting with Synaptics
- Discussions are on-going with Mission Street, Longfellow and to a lesser extent Railpen
- Discussions with Chris Rand of Queen Edith's Forum

Future Plans

- Charity Bingo Night at Fulbourn Institute Sports and Social Club
- Chasing stall at the Cambridge Folk Festival
- Grand Arcade pitch
- Event on the Bellway Green – possibly film night
- Tim Boniface - jazz night
- Russ McPherson is hoping to organise a first aider event

Other Items

- Steadily increasing money from easyfundraising
- Donations have continued through our Just Giving Page
- We are collecting various bits of equipment in good conditions where we can - crockery from CU, Lockers, plates, teapots etc.

Summary

This has been a roller coaster of a year for CHCBS. There have been times when the project has seemed as though it has been on a knife edge. Thanks to the City Council we have the extra funding needed. The build has started in time to meet Building Regulations. Events have been held, serious fund-raising has started and with knowledge of the build timeline, grants can be applied for. As the fencing went up round the library Cherry Hinton residents began to realise that the Hub is going to happen as did the directors. Thanks to my fellow directors for all their hard work – we are all going to need even more energy in the coming year!

Mo Child (Chair of Cherry Hinton Community Benefit Society - 08.06.23)